

ANGLICANS RAISING HELL  
ON THEIR PILGRIMAGE TO HEAVEN

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*Re:  
Audacious  
Anglicans?*

We make stereotypes in an attempt to have a manageable picture of groups of people, not our own. And in doing so we tacitly admit that reality is often too complicated for us. So we need easy handles on others in order to feel comfortable ourselves. Anglicans, like every other religious denomination, have not escaped stereotyping.

There was a time when Anglicanism in England was dubbed "The Tory Party at prayer" And that label far outlasted the its accuracy. In the United States one wit called Episcopalians "the sleek who inherit the earth", referring, of course, to the great wealth of the Episcopal Church and the commensurate comfort and social cachet of some of its members.

Stereotypes are obstinate things. They robustly withstand evidence to the contrary. They don't easily go away. One example. When Gerry Rayner and I proposed a series of articles entitled "Audacious Anglicans" a lot of people said to us: "Audacious Anglicans—isn't that an oxymoron?" One gentleman said to me "I can understand "addled Anglicans" – yes; but audacious ones – preposterous."

It was with that sort of assumption in mind that I chose the title of this talk "Anglicans raising hell on their pilgrimage to heaven". By raising hell I meant fighting social, political or racial injustice, standing up to oppressive and abusive rulers, seeking, in the face of stiff opposition, to change the conditions that entrapped the week in de-humanising degradation. In other words people with strong social consciences and the will to act upon them.

Anglicanism has sired its fair share of people whose lives answer to that description. But not many Anglican lay people know about them, even if some of them are mentioned in the monthly calendar at the beginning of the Book of Alternative Services. And by a curious paradox, I have come across individuals of other denominations, or even convinced secularists, who are more aware of these people than Anglicans are.

For this evening's presentation, I have selected four significant personalities, from among many whose lives embodied the conviction that a perfect society on earth was not possible. But each of them refused to accept that the glaring injustices of their own societies were beyond change. These Audacious Anglicans range from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the present and they include clergy, laity, men and women.

I begin with William Wilberforce. The number of places, churches and educational institutions named after him in North America and the Caribbean is witness to the gratitude the descendants of African slaves feel for him. At birth in 1759 he was not expected to live, but the Lord had plans for him and he did not die until 1833, 74 years later.

Once pronounced by a leading French female writer "as the wittiest man in England and the most religious", he had a magical charm and a unique social charisma. Yet he had a twisted body, and his stature was diminutive, so much so that his opponents dubbed him "the shrimp".

An Anglican by baptism, his religion was rather coolly rational until 1874, when he hit a spiritual crisis which incapacitated him for two years. He emerged from his dark night of the soul with a fervent faith, and soon he acquired a grand objective. The faith was Evangelical and the objective was the abolition of the British Slave trade. And those two things were intertwined.

The Evangelical Movement, in which John and Charles Wesley were the early leading dynamos, brought passionate piety back to the Church of England. It was a religion of the heart and the conscience. Prayer and bible meditation were paramount, and through them, Jesus became powerfully present to the faithful believer. Such individuals naturally formed close-knit communities, centered on their parish church, and such communities became powerhouses for the reform -- the cleansing -- of English public life.

Wilberforce belonged to one such powerhouse -- the "Clapham Sect"-- composed of some of the most devout, disciplined, bible-scrutinising people in England: worldly-wise spirits, gifted, clever, practical and influential. Upper-middle class, they were nearly all wealthy. They were maliciously called the "Saints" because of their strict piety. They could have been called the "Magi" because of their array of talents.

All of them were very learned -- some of them were preposterously so. Not for them the belief that politics was one thing, morality another and never the twain could meet! Wilberforce was the classic example: he saw his 40-year role in parliament as doing the will of God. On one thing the Clapham group agreed: The Slave Trade was an abomination, a shameful blot on Britain's character and should be terminated.

From 1789 to 1807, Wilberforce brought before the House of Commons 19 Bills for the abolition of the Slave Trade, and all but one were either defeated, shelved or made toothless. The man had to possess an outrageous pertinacity to hold his course: Wilberforce was not for turning.

Of course he was up against a combination of immensely powerful forces when he began his crusade: the West India interest with many members of Parliament in its pocket, the King who believed that slavery was sanctioned in the Bible, the top-brass of the Royal navy and those who saw Wilberforce's campaign as an assault on private property.



The royal navy was the guarantor of Britain's imperial supremacy, and the Slave Trade was the nursery that provided its excellent sailors. How dare this crumpled little cypher of a man seek to bring the Trade down.

Wilberforce's enemies were venomous. One Jamaican Slave owner whipped him senseless outside the House of Commons. He was the victim of remorseless smear campaigns. His friends often abandoned him in the Commons. He was cut to the quick too many times to mention.

Like many of us engaged in large, bristlingly, difficult enterprises, he often suffered from black moods of doubt. But he always bounced back, with the resilience the Greek myths reserved for the gods.

In 1807, the Bill for the abolition of the Slave trade was finally passed by both Houses of Parliament. And Wilberforce got one of the longest standing ovations ever given to a parliamentarian. The little shrimp had become a whale. What had happened was that, between 1789 and 1907, Wilberforce consolidated a large constituency with the Quakers and the Non-conformists throughout England for the abolition of the trade.

It consisted partly of humanitarians who were scandalised by the sheer the brutality of the trade, religious people who saw slavery as institutionalized sin, and the rising captains of the industrial revolution who wanted to sell their goods to the world unburdened by a West Indian straight jacket of trade. On top of all that, Britain's commercial interests were shifting to India and the East Indies and enough members of Parliament were ready to cash in on that seismic change.

The day after the great act was passed, Wilberforce was breakfasting with his Clapham Community. In a mood of exhilaration, he asked, "what shall we abolish next?" He did not think he had raised enough hell in the Lord's name.

When slavery in the West Indies refused to roll over and die, he added his political weight to the Emancipation movement in the 1820s and died just as the Act abolishing slavery was sailing through Parliament.

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Let us now turn from the Britain of the early 1800s to the America of the late 1800s and from a male Anglican to a female one. The place is Massachusetts, where social snobbery reigned supreme. Some of you may remember a little ditty that poked fun at the nose-in-the-air class-consciousness of the New Englanders of those days:

And this is the good old Boston  
The home of the bean and the cod  
Where the Lowells talk to the Cabots  
and the Cabots talk only to God.

Our Anglican lady is Vida Dutton Scudder (1861–1954) and she came from "la crème de la crème" of that society. Her father was a Congregational missionary in India, where Vida was born. But he died early and she spent most of her childhood in Europe with her mother. Her family were highly intellectual people, comfortable, confident and refined.

They spoke with an accent that announced the superiority of their genes. They did not need money to confirm their social credentials. But they had enough of it to treat it with lordly disdain.

And yet Vida was to become many things that her family and social equals were not. For a start, she became an Anglican, and not just an Anglican but an Anglo-Catholic. This appalled her peers, for it seemed she was wallowing in Mediterranean religious superstitions slightly gentrified by an English upper-class veneer.

Worse than that, she became a socialist, even to the extent of borrowing a few pages from the Marxist scriptures. And ... she was to spend a lot of her life among the industrial underclass of the Eastern seaboard of America, trying to rescue them from the blight of poverty and the mental and physical deformity that went with it.

Vida had a versatile mind and a wide-ranging pen. She wrote books on literature, on society, on theology. She authored biographies and novels. Her autobiography still makes an enjoyable and witty read. For 40 years, she was a professor of English Literature at Wellesley College, Massachusetts, an upper-class womens' institution. Her students found her teaching a most liberating experience, as it constituted a challenge to male domination. She made the blinkers fall from their eyes. They were suddenly awakened to the harsh and cruel industrial under-belly of their society.

But Vida wanted her students not just to recognise the grim reality of poverty but to learn to change it. So she and her like-minded women companions created the College Settlements Association. They planted vacation residences for well-to-do university students in the most appalling slums of Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

The aim? To bring together in solidarity and empathy those had known nothing but plenty and those who had known nothing but penury. The hope was that the slum-dwellers would become conscious of their worth, while the students became conscious of their needs: better wages, better housing, better sanitation, and of course, literacy.

At the outset Vida, like Wilberforce before her, underestimated the enormity of the task she set herself. Making social change is never easy. And it usually requires a rigorously realistic body of motivating ideas and a strategy to match. So, in 1889, Vida, at the age of 28, became a socialist, a credo that attracted some fine American minds and spirits, for it did not yet have the odour of venomous subversion that stuck to it after the Russian Revolution.

Vida's socialism had an educational character: to permeate the society with ideas of fundamental change acceptable to top and bottom. Her socialism was borrowed from the Fabians in Britain. If the working classes, the argument ran, were no longer the victims of anxiety (because their working conditions ensured adequate food, shelter, sanitation and education) then the gain for the upper classes would be increased security. Security at the top, and sufficiency at the bottom, would lead to a society of approximate harmony. That harmony would be guaranteed by the working classes adopting middle class virtues, chief among which was the devotion to law and order.



But America then, as now, was not ready for any kind of socialism, whether Christian or rationalist. Nor was the Episcopal Church happy to accommodate cells of socialists seeking to sharpen its social conscience. Which was what Vida was bent on doing. Neither were the socialists ready to adopt an Anglican orientation which was what Vida was trying to achieve.

A decade after Vida's conversion to socialism, she suffered a complete nervous collapse. Part of it was due to exhaustion, but most of it was due to a sense of failure. Hell was not freezing over: the workers' conditions remained abysmal. The captains of industry remained impervious to enlightenment.

Vida headed for a rest-cure in Italy. There she had an epiphany. St. Francis of Assisi and St. Catherine of Sienna, both of whom had tried in the middle ages to make the church more caring of the poor,-- and had failed -- became living presences in her spirit, strengthening her to the point of recovery. Here was the past living therapeutically in Vida's present. That made her more spiritual and more radical.

She returned to America with a socialist urgency that was almost revolutionary. When the Russian Revolution occurred, she hailed it as "the judgement of God on a society that was callously brutal to its poor". But when the Revolution began to devour its children, and much else besides, she turned against it and took down the red flag that had hung beside the crucifix in her chapel since October 1917. She became convinced, she said, "that no revolution could bring ultimate salvation unless it proceeded from a Christian Conception of man."

Her concept of humanity flowed from her Anglo-Catholic theology, not from Marx. When God became human in Christ, it was His declaration in action that the physical was every bit as important to Him as the spiritual. In other words, matter supremely matters to the Divine. To separate the spiritual from the physical was to totally misunderstand the meaning of Jesus. And to assume that God gave a poor second place to the material dimension of people's lives, especially when that dimension disfigured and degraded them, was to miss the message of the Gospels altogether.

It was this sort of theology that prompted the socialist Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, to say in the late 1930s that "Christianity was the most materialistic of all the great religions".

Vida recognised in the early 1920s that socialism would never fly in America. But she never abandoned her campaign for the empowerment of the working classes. She supported their strikes for better working conditions, she encourage them to develop a strong class solidarity -- one of the things that the captains of industry most feared. As early as 1912, when she publicly supported a strike by garment workers in New England and declared that she would wear no garment produced under such dehumanising conditions, the big guns of industry called for Wellesley College to sack her. But the College refused and protected her in the name of academic freedom.

She was a strong supporter of American Trade Unionism, at a time when people of her class found it dangerously un-American. And she helped create in her denomination The church League for Industrial Democracy.

Vida learned from St. Francis of Assisi and St. Catherine of Siena that heavy sacrifice is inevitably the lot of those who try to spearhead profound change in any society. And that sacrifice is usually seen as a sign of failure. This insight brought home to her the meaning of the Crucifixion of Christ, which was taken by all but a few of his contemporaries as a sign of utter failure. She built that into her theology of the meaning of Christ, and it remains for Anglicans a touchstone of their understanding of Jesus.

Vida Scudder underlines one of the features of Anglicanism which many non-Anglicans regard as a weakness, but Anglicans see as a virtue -- its broad inclusiveness. No one ever tried to have Vida expelled from the Episcopal Church for her robustly Leftist views. Some saw her as a prickly inconvenience, others, more wisely, viewed her as creatively impertinent. Others regarded her as the voice of conscience, always uncomfortable but ever necessary.

Certainly she made it hot for those who asserted that ethics and economics have nothing to do with each other. (And heating things up is part of what I mean by raising hell) As Anglicans we can be happy she existed within our community.

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If you were to brave the steps to the balcony of this Church, and study that magnificent stained glass window just above it, you will see there outlined some of the Canadians who have followed in the footsteps of William Wilberforce and Vida Scudder. But those are stories we have heard at other times, if not in other places.

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Let's now leave North America, and go to Uganda in Africa, via London. Those of us who visit Westminster Abbey will see, just over the Great West Door, a striking company of sculptured figures. They are martyrs of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, reminders of an awesome fact, that the last century of the previous millennium was conspicuously an age of martyrdom.

Archbishop Janani Luwum is depicted there -- a giant of a man, both physically and spiritually. He was murdered at the hand of President Idi Amin, whose death occurred recently. Amin was a psychopath with a bloodlust. He turned Uganda, once described as "the Pearl of Africa", into a land of fear, suspicion and gruesome deaths. The slightest hint of criticism was enough to invite death. Janani Luwum knew that, but, when he led his bishops in a pointed protest against the President's rape of Uganda, Martin Luther's "cry of conscience" way back in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century could have been his own. "Here I stand, God helping me, I can do no other".

I remember overhearing the Archbishop say in this very hall, during Lent in 1976, "Life is very uncertain in my country at the moment, particularly for one who is both an Acholi and an Anglican". He knew that the price of being Christ's disciple in Uganda in 1976 was a costly one, but he was prepared to pay it, and would, within the year.



Janani Luwum constitutes a considerable contrast to the two Anglicans I have just talked about. They came from wealth and comfort, where “raising hell” could be considered eccentric but not terminal. On the other hand, Janani was the offspring of a poor tribal family in the harsh scrub-land area of northern Uganda, too unattractive for even the Imperial British.

He grew up with the old primal religion. He was a remarkable youth, a superb hunter, a splendid dancer a music-maker and an artist who painted on the barks of trees. Illiterate until the age of ten, he had to leave high school early because of the school fees, but an Anglican missionary priest saw he had the temperament of a leader, and the mind of a scholar and financed teacher training for him.

Janani came into the Anglican priesthood in an interesting way. He was drawn to leadership in a dynamic revivalist Movement led by lay people, and brought them into a lethargic Anglican Church, which was beset by the bickering of priests of different tribes and their white bishops. The Balokole Movement preached hope and harmony through repentance and reconciliation, which were welcomed during this restless period in East Africa.

Although his preaching was so charismatic that he was twice arrested for evangelically disturbing the peace, it didn't stop him from becoming Bishop of Northern Uganda, and finally, Archbishop and the first black Primate of the country.

Amin distrusted Janani from the outset. He was an Acholi, and Acholis had been very loyal to Dr. Obote. He was a popular Christian leader, and Amin was a Muslim hoping to reverse the Christian dominance by extending Islam in the country. As Janani gained an international reputation at the World Council of Churches, Amin's distrust turned poisonous.

Janani's signature at the top of interfaith denouncement of the misuse of power and unravelling of the country put him at the top of Amin's “hit list”.

The Entebbe airport raid that rescued 160 Israelis held hostage by Amin's forces was an international humiliation for the dictator, but he turned it into a means to persecute the Primate as a scapegoat.

Despite international distribution of a bold and unmincing protest to Amin by the Anglican Bishops of Uganda, Amin decided that the time had come to “get rid of this turbulent priest” – the words that Henry II of England had used about Archbishop Thomas a'Beckett.

Janani knew his days were numbered, but told a bishop that, “I sense the hand of God in this. I will be killed, but my death will strengthen the Church in Uganda against this bloody tyrant”. The next day it was officially announced that the Archbishop and two cabinet ministers had been killed in a car crash, an effective African form of assassination.

Amin proclaimed that no memorial service of any sort should be held for the Archbishop, but Janani's flock was smarter than the dictator. The Sunday after the assassination, a vast crowd of thousands assembled in Namirembe Cathedral on one of Kampala's hills, ostensibly for morning prayer. During the service, no mention was made of Janani, but, at the end of the service, the whole congregation stayed in their pews and an awesome silence ensued. Then, with that wonderful African gift of breaking into spontaneous song, the congregation rose and sang the hymn sung by the Christian page boys of the Buganda King in 1886 when he had them burned to death. Everyone knew that they were saying that Archbishop Janani Luwum was the first martyr of the second century of Christianity in Uganda.

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We began with a little man with immense moral stature. We end with another little man of similar stature and with an immense international reputation. Of course, I refer to Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Desmond Tutu, like Janani Luwum, began life in a humble village. He was not dirt poor, but could not claim any great wealth. He grew up knowing that whites dominated the land. He tells of retrieving used newspapers, and spreading them on the sidewalk, eager to learn of the world around him. White youth would walk deliberately across the pages, their smirks forging the reality of a sense of powerlessness for blacks. The one person who seemed to recognize his mother's African dignity was Father Trevor Huddleston, who was their Parish Priest. He was to play a very important part in many states of his life.

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Tutu had tuberculosis in his teen years. His lungs were bleeding and he was expected to die, but Father Huddleston's visits seem to have given him the will to live. He brought books to read and sat and talked to him in such a comforting way that he took away the danger of death. He wanted badly to do medicine but couldn't afford it.

He, too became trained as a teacher, but then felt pulled to the Anglican ministry, training both in South Africa and in Britain.

He returned from Britain a time when Apartheid was at its peak, and he saw the effects on his people – the misery, the poverty, the fear and the sense of powerlessness. But, somehow he always sensed that underneath that powerlessness was a great pool of resilient hope.

It was a model of Trevor Huddleston's struggle against Apartheid that provided Tutu with the first shape of his own resistance. And that grew exponentially as the years went on.

Because of his often quiet but powerful articulateness, his prophetic ability in the face of Apartheid's injustice and his intellectual acumen and organizational skills. He rose to be Bishop of Lesotho, and Chairman of the Southern African Conference of Churches, which of course focussed the eyes of the leaders of Apartheid on him – he was clearly a man to watch.



When he became Dean of Johannesburg in 1976, he realized that he had a world platform and he also realized that the battle against Apartheid had to be fought not just locally but globally. And, in that he had magnificent help from Trevor Huddleston. Of whom he once said, that “no one kept the issue of South African Apartheid before the eyes of the world more effectively and for a longer time than Trevor Huddleston.

With Mandela and most of the ANC leaders in prison, Desmond Tutu became the face and the voice of the Anti-apartheid movement. And since he always advocated non-violent resistance, he acquired a moral authority, even in South Africa, which the Apartheid Regime did not quite know how to stifle, and, being strategic people, decided it would not be wise to assassinate him. He identified totally with his African brothers and sisters, even to the extent of frequently going to jail.

The integrity and authority of his voice around the world, and his personal bravery, earned him the Nobel Peace Prize, which was an embarrassment to the exponents of Apartheid, and they tried their best to belittle it. He said he received it representationally, for behind him lay people suffering deeply but resisting in every way they could heroically.

Desmond Tutu said that when he as a child, he loved to read the Bible stories, particularly of Moses coming out of the bull rushes to lead the people of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt. Other favourites were Samson defeating the Philistines with a weapon so primitive but so powerful that it was symbolized in the bible by the jawbone of an ass, and the victory of David over Goliath.

As he grew older, he became fascinated by the great prophets in the Old Testament that told him that this is a moral universe, and however painfully long evil is allowed to triumph, the universe usually reverses that triumph in the name of goodness, humanness and God's power.

He raised hell with the language of heaven. He made it very hot for the wielders of Apartheid power, without failing into their grasp of using violence. He made it hot by growing in stature right through the darkest period of South Africa's agony. He made it hot for them when he supported the idea of international sanctions against South Africa, knocking the bottom out of the argument made by those who said that it was only the Africans who would suffer.

And he made it hot for them with his extremely powerful sense of humour, for, all through the Apartheid period, he mocked it as being riddled with absurdities and fatuities. He smiled at the extremes of nonsense to which they were driving, pretending they were a bulwark of Christian civilization, surrounded by a sea of seething barbarism.

He loves to tell the story, told by others as well, that when the Whites arrived in Africa, they possessed the Bible and the Africans possessed the land. So the Whites said to the Africans, “Let us close our eyes in prayer”. After the “amen”, the Africans opened their eyes to find that they had the Bible and the Whites had the land.

But then Tutu gives it his own special twist: He says that the Bible is a "Ticking Time Bomb" for oppressed people, and the Whites did not know what they were doing when they gave them the Bible, and they have now recognized it, but now too late. For the Bible is often a record of the deliverance of an oppressed people from the domination of those who seem to have all the power on their side and still cannot stop the revolution.

When at Bishops University to receive an Honorary Degree a few years ago, Tutu made a remarkable statement: God has a wonderful sense of strategy. In order to make it acceptable for conservatives of other countries who supported the Apartheid state as the bulwark against Communism in Southern Africa, God brings down the Berlin Wall, Communism collapses, and the Apartheid state is no longer of vital importance to its conservative sympathisers.

The recognition of that by the South African government paved the way for the release of Mandela and the beginning of negotiations for the introduction of universal suffrage which followed. After Apartheid had been dismantled, and Mandela had been elected President of South Africa, Desmond Tutu found himself in the opposite role to the one he had played all those years: instead of "turning on the heat" he found himself trying to turn OFF the heat.

He was appointed Chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which set out to prove to all South Africans, and the world, that forgiveness is a powerful political principle in politics. He did his work with such evenhandedness that even the ANC complained, for wherever he found evidence of cruelty and brutality, he treated it the same, whether perpetrated by the upholders of Apartheid or ANC supporters. But, by and large, he and his Commission became South Africa's "healers" and gave the country the potential for a healthy future.

For me, Desmond Tutu is the prototype of the Anglican future, for he brings to a religion that was originally Anglosaxon, a great deal of Africa, some of Latin America, some of India and some of North America. He has confirmed that Anglicanism can speak through many different cultures and has reminded us that it takes the whole world to understand the whole gospel.

At the end of that convocation at Bishops, Tutu began to lead the sedate procession out of the stadium to the strains of a stately tune. He suddenly stopped and asked if someone had a trumpet and could play "When the Saints go Marching In". A young student complied, and the procession was "fired up" into a dance, led by this audacious Anglican of our time.

(at the lunch that followed, I commended a university leader in the procession for dancing to Tutu's lead. He replied, "Sir, that was not dancing, I was merely re-arranging my rigidities.")

May I dare to hope that what we have done together tonight does not prompt a re-arranging of our rigidities, but an enhanced flexibility and an appropriate audacity when necessary to turn up the heat in the spirit of these Anglicans.